

By J. P. O'CONNOR*

In August 1976, I received a letter from Mr. Luke Dillon-Mahon concerning his late uncle's (R. E. Dillon) entomological collection at Clonbrock House, Ahascragh, Co. Galway. In it, Mr. Dillon-Mahon informed me that the house and its contents were shortly to be auctioned. He invited me to examine the insects before the sale.

R. E. Dillon, later Lord Clonbrock, was the centre of a major entomological controversy in Ireland. He recorded, or Kane recorded on his behalf, the capture of a very large number of species of Lepidoptera new or rare to this country. Many of these have been found since to be quite unreliable and have been omitted from the Irish list (Baynes, 1964). Beirne (1953) states that P. P. Graves wrote for permission to see Dillon's collection and was refused, and on visiting Clonbrock was refused entry to the house. The material does not appear to have been inspected since the beginning of the controversy. During my visit in 1976, I made some brief notes concerning the composition and arrangement of the collection. In view of the mystery surrounding it, these may be of some interest.

I arrived at Clonbrock House on the 25 August. Mr. Dillon-Mahon brought me upstairs to a room where the collection was housed. He allowed me to study it at my leisure; a pleasant experience enhanced by the Dillon-Mahon family's hospitality which included dinner and later tea and buttered scones.

The collection was housed in four cabinets as follows:-

(1) a cabinet of mainly tropical Lepidoptera of which only a few carried data labels. It is likely that they were purchased. There was also a mixed assemblage of British or/and Irish moths in a few drawers but they were unnamed and disorganised. A few bore green printed labels with "Clonbrock". The bottom drawer contained scorpions and a Customs' declaration form. All the specimens were in good condition.

(2) The second cabinet was a double one with a Watkins and Doncaster plate. It held Irish and other Lepidoptera. The specimens were neatly arranged with printed labels cut from a label list. A variety of pins had been used including white, black, Continental, English, cut etc. The only extensive data labelling was of "Clonbrock" specimens. These labels were mainly printed on green paper. In several drawers, unused "Clonbrock" labels were lying loose. In a few instances, handwritten labels were evident. Other labels (e.g. Kerry and a few other localities) were present but they were very sparse. A large proportion of the specimens in the cabinet had no labels. Specimens with labels were often mixed in the same row with ones without labels. All the material seemed to be well preserved undoubtedly because of well-fitting lids. It did not appear to

*National Museum of Ireland, Dublin 2.

have been disturbed for a long time possibly not since Lord Clonbrock's death in 1926. In some drawers, dead Australian Spider Beetles (*Ptinus tectus* Boieldieu) were evident but they had caused no obvious damage. There was a little mite and mould damage.

(3) This cabinet held a mixture of insect groups including Hymenoptera, Coleoptera, Hemiptera, Trichoptera and Odonata. Nearly all the specimens had been named but few had data labels. The species appeared to be mostly ones which are widely distributed.

(4) The fourth cabinet contained Lepidoptera which were probably collected on the Continent. They were also named but lacked data.

There are various views as to why Dillon was responsible for so many discredited records (Beirne, 1953; Huggins, 1953). However, after over fifty years since his death, it is now unlikely that the truth will be ever ascertained. Nevertheless, my examination of his collection does indicate that careless labelling may have been responsible for some erroneous records. Whether it contributed to a significant degree must remain unknown.

There are voucher specimens representing most of Dillon's doubtful records preserved in the National Museum of Ireland.

Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to Mr. Luke Dillon-Mahon for giving me the opportunity to examine the R. E. Dillon collection and for making my visit such a pleasant one.

References

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ACLYPEA OPACA L. (COL.: SILPHIDAE) IN WEST KENT —
To judge from the records (or rather, the lack of them), this phytophagous Silphid has become decidedly rare with us during the latter half or more of the present century, though formerly it seems to have been less uncommon. In the course of some 50 years I have met with it but three times; one of these finds (of several on beet and goosefoot at Burwell Fen, Cambs.) was briefly mentioned in 1950, *Ent. mon. Mag.*, 86 : 43. In June 1943 I took an example by sweeping at Byfleet, Surrey, the locality being next door to Woking whence Fowler (1889, *Col. Brit. Isl.*, 3: 50) records it. My first capture however was as long ago as August 1930, when a pair occurred in a rotten stump on Seal Common in the Sevenoaks district. I have seen no published record of *A. opaca* for West Kent; Fowler (1908, VCH list) gives only Whitstable and Deal, both in the eastern vice-county. — A. A. ALLEN.